

Panhandle Riders Association

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A letter from the President of **Panhandle Riders Association**

My letter...

To the Public Lands Interim Committee,

Returning control of the federally managed lands in Idaho back to the citizens of Idaho is not without unforeseen challenges. For this reason, I want to thank you for your request for input as we move forward in this direction.

My name is Thomas Leo. I am the President of the Panhandle Riders Association Inc. and a member of Back Country ATV Inc. Together these two sports clubs represent over 250 ATV/UTV enthusiasts in North Idaho.

Did you know that Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) sports enthusiasts spent \$434,000,000 in Idaho in just one year? (source: <http://www.idahostateatv.org/publications.html>)

Clubs like ours seek to protect the land as much as we enjoy riding to the remote areas for recreation, camping, hunting and more. As a club, we work to protect our right to ride on public lands and are one of the few sports that willingly pay licensing fees that go to preserve and repair the trails throughout Idaho. In spite of the fact that ATV/UTV licenses pay for millions of dollars of repairs, we welcome the fact that these same trails are enjoyed by ourselves and others for hiking, bike riding, horse back riding and more.

As much as I favor the idea of returning the public lands of Idaho to the citizens, where it belongs, I hesitate to do so without voicing the need for much better management of the land by the state run land management organizations. From the perspective of a person who enjoys the land, there's just too much bureaucracy, confusing rules, inconsistent maps, improperly identified areas, unscheduled trail closures, and closures without public input, that make it difficult to stay within the law, which is our desire.

Let us talk about one organization that we as an OHV group would presently have to oppose to manage more public lands in North Idaho, the Idaho Department of Lands. IDL has the honorable goal of generating revenue for public schools, hospitals, veterans, and correctional systems. They seem to do an admirable job and we note that the southern management of the organization seems to work very well with the public. However, that has not been our experience with the northern regional management under Eric Besaw. They seem to have lost sight of the fact that the land belongs to the people of Idaho. To them, it's about money, not people. Their preference is to waste money trying to prevent citizens from enjoying the land rather than working with groups like ours who can educate people on how to effectively protect the land while enjoying it.

In theory, the Idaho Dept. of Lands could arbitrarily cordon off forests to prevent human caused damage to them and thus increase the revenue generated by them. Attempts to do this in the state of Washington have proved futile and have only served to attract people who couldn't care less about breaking the law. These lawbreakers have no concern about the environmental impact they pose to the land. Washington is left trying to police the make shift meth labs and abuse of the land that pockmark the forests of Eastern Washington. I believe that these are the unforeseen consequences of not fostering a good working relationship with clubs like ours that are made up of volunteers, ready and willing to help manage the land, put up signage, and educate the public about respecting their trail systems. More cooperation between the governing organizations and citizens will greatly increase the source of revenue for the state as well as a self-policing citizenry. With land management agency accountability to local elected officials we would be able to support a transfer of lands back to the state. Without it, we feel there will be more harm done to the citizens of our state than if we left lands under federal control.

Sincerely,
Thomas Leo
President, Panhandle Riders Assoc. Inc.